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Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations from the programme evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decisions on evaluations submitted to the Committee (see A/37/38, para. 362). The present triennial review determined the extent to which the recommendations emanating from the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) programme evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) were implemented.

The OIOS evaluation recommendations addressed two aspects of the effectiveness of ESCAP in executing its mandate: its research and analysis work and its subregional work. At the conclusion of its fifty-fifth session, the Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 65 to 68 of the report of OIOS on the evaluation of ESCAP (E/AC.51/2015/7). The present triennial review determined that, of the four recommendations, three were implemented and one recommendation (recommendation 3) was partially implemented. There was some evidence of positive outcomes resulting from the implemented recommendations.

The triennial review was conducted through: (a) a review and analysis of biennial progress reports on the status of OIOS recommendations; (b) an analysis of relevant information, documents and reports; and (c) interviews with ESCAP staff.

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.
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Recommendation 1 addressed the need to implement previous recommendations made by the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee. A permanent editorial board was established as a platform for joint planning and implementation of biennial publications programmes in line with the secretariat's strategic direction for 2015–2020 and the role of ESCAP as a regional think tank. The Editorial Board was considered to be fulfilling its purpose. The implementation of other recommendations was still outstanding, but the Editorial Board was understood to be taking them forward.
Recommendation 2 addressed the need for more data on the utilization, effectiveness and impact of ESCAP research and analysis work. Important steps were taken to increase the availability of monitoring and evaluation data. The ESCAP institutional results framework outlined a results chain linking subprogramme outputs to secretariat-wide development results. Research and analysis were included in the framework results chain, and were assigned specific performance indicators. In addition, the number of subprogramme/thematic evaluations increased.
Recommendation 3 addressed the need for wider dissemination of ESCAP research and analysis work. ESCAP published communications guidelines to ensure consistency and coherence across the organization and the maintenance of a common visual identity. It revamped its website and consolidated various newsletters. Despite those improvements, however, the recommendation was only partially implemented, as ESCAP did not yet have a final outreach strategy, nor had it established a single database of all stakeholders.
ESCAP research and analysis work did experience some positive changes, including improved quality and timeliness of ESCAP publications; better linkages between ESCAP research and analysis and its normative and technical cooperation work; improved credibility of ESCAP as a research organization; wider dissemination of ESCAP publications through the Internet and social media; and increased availability of monitoring and evaluation data on ESCAP research and analysis work.
Recommendation 4 addressed the need to improve collaboration between ESCAP substantive divisions and its subregional offices. In November 2014, a guidance note on relations between ESCAP substantive divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions was issued. Coordination mechanisms played an important role in reducing uncertainties and ensuring adherence to and internalizing the provisions of the guidance note. There was no substantial increase in resources for ESCAP subregional work, but that no longer seemed to be an issue. The budget for the 2018–2019 biennium saw an increase in professional posts for South-East Asia and North and Central Asia. As a result of those combined efforts, ESCAP subregional work was perceived to have been strengthened.

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-fifth session, in 2015, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the programme evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (E/AC.51/2015/7). Delegations expressed appreciation for the report. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations, while recognizing that certain progress had already been made.

2. The present report is issued pursuant to a triennial review of the recommendations, and examines the current status of the implementation of the four recommendations contained in the evaluation report. The review also discusses whether the implementation of the recommendations contributed to changes, and, if so, to what extent.

3. The methodology for the triennial review included:

(a) Review and analysis of biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the OIOS recommendations database;

(b) Analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from ESCAP on various topics related to the recommendations;

(c) Remote interviews with a non-random sample of ESCAP staff.

4. The present report incorporates comments received from ESCAP during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with ESCAP, on which comments were received (see annex). OIOS expresses its appreciation for the cooperation extended by ESCAP in the drafting of the present report.

II. Results

5. ESCAP was established in 1947 as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council and the regional arm of the United Nations in the Asia-Pacific region. It serves 53 member States and 9 associate members. The ESCAP mandate is to promote regional cooperation and action for inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific. It provides a forum for its member States on regional cooperation and assists them in building and sustaining shared economic growth and social equity. The ESCAP secretariat undertakes numerous research and analysis activities in the context of its substantive areas of focus and many ESCAP research and analysis activities culminate in publications. The ESCAP secretariat, which supports the Commission, is located in Bangkok and is headed by the Executive Secretary, and the delivery of ESCAP programmes is supported by the subregional offices and regional institutions. The Pacific subregional office was opened in 1984, the East and North-East Asia office began operating in 2010 and the North and Central Asia and the South and South-West Asia offices began operating in 2011. Subregional activities for South-East Asia are managed by ESCAP headquarters.

6. OIOS made four recommendations for ESCAP related to: (a) implementing a research and publications agenda; (b) improving the monitoring and evaluation of its research and analysis work; (c) developing and implementing an outreach strategy; and (d) implementing a framework on the working relations between ESCAP subregional offices and divisions. Three recommendations were implemented, while one recommendation was partially implemented (recommendation 3). There was

some evidence of positive outcomes resulting from the implemented recommendations. The implementation status of each of the four recommendations is discussed below.

Recommendation 1
Implementation of a research and publications agenda

7. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

> The Executive Secretary should establish an action plan to implement recommendations from the Research and Publications Committee with concrete timelines and clear roles and responsibilities, giving emphasis to establishing a multi-year research agenda and a permanent research and publications committee. The research agenda should take into account joint planning, development and dissemination of research and analysis work between all divisions and subregional offices and linkages between the research and analysis work of ESCAP and its normative and technical cooperation work.

8. The recommendation was made on the basis of the evaluation result that ESCAP should institutionalize and implement recommendations made by the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee in 2013.

9. The report of the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee to the Executive Secretary of ESCAP of May 2013 contained 7 key recommendations and 35 associated suggestions for improving the quality, outreach and impact of ESCAP publications, which included: (a) establishing a permanent ESCAP Research and Publications Committee to coordinate the research agenda and oversee the publications programme; (b) rationalizing existing resources and functions to enhance the effectiveness of the ESCAP publications programme; (c) strengthening the ESCAP publications strategy; (d) enhancing ESCAP research capabilities; (e) creating a branding strategy for and disseminating ESCAP publications and documents; and (f) representing ESCAP on the United Nations Publications Board. The report was presented to ESCAP senior management on 11 June 2013. At the meeting, it was decided that the Chief of Staff would identify which of the recommendations could be instituted immediately and which would need further discussion and consideration by the Senior Management Team for later implementation.

10. While no official action plan was developed to implement the Research and Publication Committee's recommendations, their implementation was set in motion through the activities of a permanent ESCAP editorial board. In 2015, a permanent Research and Publications Committee was established to serve as a platform for planning, developing and disseminating research and publications from across ESCAP. The Committee was later renamed the ESCAP Editorial Board. The terms of reference of the Board, dated June 2016, required it to establish a strategic approach and set guidelines for the ESCAP publications programme, in line with the organization's programme of work focused on inclusive and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific. Although they did not state it in writing, during interviews for the triennial review staff reported that the Board was responsible for implementing the recommendations of the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee. The Editorial Board was chaired by the Executive Secretary, and the Chief of the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section served as Secretary. Its terms of reference determined that it should hold at least four formal meetings a year, with a membership comprising division heads and representatives from subregional offices and regional

institutes. From February 2016 to March 2017, the Editorial Board met in person five times. After that, due to scheduling conflicts, matters were discussed by email.

11. Staff interviewed also agreed that the Editorial Board had introduced a streamlined and more consistent and rigorous review process for research and publications. Main benefits of the new process were joint planning (including the joint review of proposed publication titles), stronger oversight during inception phases and cross-fertilization between divisions. Staff noted that the Board had worked well, in that publications focused on more than one topic and included cross-cutting issues. Furthermore, they stated that the quality of ESCAP publications had improved, as had the credibility of ESCAP as a research organization.

12. In 2013, the Research and Publications Committee had recommended that all ESCAP publications should be guided, as appropriate, by a multi-year research agenda in support of the institution's vision and key mandates. An ESCAP multi-year corporate research agenda was found to exist in the standard form of biennial publications programmes. Contrary to earlier bienniums, an overarching framework was developed in the form of the Executive Secretary's guidance note on the secretariat's strategic direction for 2015–2020. The framework set the substantive agenda for the entirety of the Commission's work, including its research and publications.

13. For the 2016–2017 and 2018–2019 bienniums, ESCAP issued instructions to its substantive divisions and subregional offices that required them to assess publications for their continued relevance and to remove obsolete titles. In addition, proposed publications were required to be founded in intergovernmental mandates (see ST/SGB/2012/2).

14. ESCAP publications were published in a timely manner. Thirty-one publications were included in the standard publications programme for the biennium 2016–2017. All publications went through the revised review process and were published. In addition, four publications were added to the programme and released at the request of member States. The United Nations Publications Board approved 27 publications for the publications programme for the biennium 2018–2019.

15. To ensure greater linkages between its research and analysis work and its normative and technical cooperation work, ESCAP included its research and analysis work as part of the preparations for the work programmes of its subprogrammes. To link ESCAP publications with its intergovernmental work, and to promote the usage of its publications, ESCAP presented and discussed flagship publications at ESCAP intergovernmental meetings in 2017. The *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2017* was launched at the fifth session of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction; the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2017* was launched at a meeting of the Committee on Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Financing for Development; and the *Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2017* was discussed at a meeting of the Committee on Trade and Investment. Further interlinkages and synergies were expected with the implementation of Umoja Extension 2, covering online strategic planning and performance management.

16. Biennial publications programmes were also reviewed by the Editorial Board, resulting in the improved quality of ESCAP publications and the well-coordinated planning and review of research and publication work with inputs from divisions and subregional offices. That fulfilled the purpose of the recommended secretariat-wide multi-year research agenda to support ESCAP in its role as a regional policy think tank.

17. The recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 2
Improvement in monitoring and evaluation of research and analysis work

18. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

> ESCAP should improve monitoring and evaluation of its research and analysis work, including publications, by establishing ESCAP-wide performance measures of such work and systematically measuring their cost-effectiveness, utilization and impact. Moreover, future self-evaluations should extend beyond single projects to include more subprogrammatic and thematic issues.

19. The recommendation was made on the basis of the evaluation result that ESCAP monitoring and evaluation data for its research and analysis function were lacking, which resulted in an inability to assess programme effectiveness. The main monitoring data source for ESCAP was the Secretariat-wide Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS). However, ESCAP had not reported all research and analysis outputs or publications in the system (see E/AC.51/2015/7, para. 9). In addition, most of its evaluations were project-based and did not cut across subprogrammes or focus on thematic issues (see E/AC.51/2015/7, para. 34).

20. Research and analysis is an integral part of the ESCAP institutional results framework results chain. It constitutes one of the core sets of activities: generate innovative research and analysis to support member States in policymaking. At the outcome level, ESCAP specifically expected that member States and other stakeholders would utilize ESCAP knowledge products to develop and improve policies and programmes for achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Five institutional indicators served to track that outcome:

- Indicator 1. Percentage of ESCAP stakeholders surveyed assessing that ESCAP is providing relevant, strategic and timely knowledge products on sustainable development. Source: ESCAP-wide stakeholder surveys (midpoint and terminal)
- Indicator 2. Percentage of ESCAP stakeholders surveyed indicating that ESCAP knowledge products are used to develop and improve policies and programmes for achieving sustainable development. Source: ESCAP-wide stakeholder surveys (midpoint and terminal)
- Indicator 3. Number of citations/references to ESCAP knowledge products in national policy documents, media outputs, policy-related literatures. Source: to be established
- Indicator 4. Number of downloads of web-distributed ESCAP flagship publications and other selected knowledge products. Source: web analytics and social media statistics from the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section (annual basis)
- Indicator 5. Number of ESCAP website visits, number of tweets and potential reach, number of "Likes" in Facebook and potential reach. Source: web analytics and social media statistics from the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section (annual basis)

21. The institutional results framework required that annual reports demonstrate progress towards achieving ESCAP results at the outcome level. In 2016, the Strategy and Programme Management Division compiled information on performance

indicators for ESCAP sessions. A draft presentation was available for 2017 that was limited to ESCAP intergovernmental and capacity development work indicators.

22. The ESCAP capacity development strategy for 2016–2019, issued in January 2017, indicated that monitoring and evaluation constituted a primary pillar of results-based management. In addition, the Executive Secretary issued updated ESCAP monitoring and evaluation policies and guidelines on subprogramme and project monitoring and evaluations.

23. The number of subprogramme/thematic evaluations increased from one per year during 2012–2015 to two per year during 2016–2017. Four subprogramme/thematic evaluations were planned for 2018 and 2019 respectively, budget allowing. The table below provides more details on ESCAP evaluations.

ESCAP subprogramme/thematic evaluations, 2012–2017

Year	*Subprogramme thematic evaluation*	*Number*
2012	Evaluation of the ESCAP subprogramme on information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction	1
2013	Review of the conference structure of ESCAP (E/ESCAP/69/18)	1
2014	Evaluation of non-reimbursable loan services at ESCAP	1
2015	Evaluation of the establishment of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management	1
2016	Evaluation of the ESCAP subprogramme on macroeconomic policy and inclusive development	2
	Evaluation of the Regional Action Programme for Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, phase II (2012–2016)	
2017	Evaluation of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia	2
	Evaluation of the ESCAP subprogramme on social development	
2018	Evaluation of the Environment and Development Division	4
	Evaluation of the Trade, Investment and Innovation Division	
	Evaluation of the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture	
	Evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology	
2019	Evaluation of the subregional offices, including cooperation and coordination with ESCAP substantive divisions and regional institutions	4
	Evaluation of the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division	
	Evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management	
	Evaluation of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization	

Source: Evaluation plan, Strategy and Programme Management Division

24. The extent to which subprogramme and thematic evaluations assessed ESCAP research and analysis work depended on the defined scope of each individual evaluation. For example, a specific objective of the evaluation of the ESCAP subprogramme on macroeconomic policy and inclusive development was to assess the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the work of the subprogramme, with a particular focus on its research and analysis work and on its work in relation to countries with special needs.

25. Staff interviewed agreed that the availability of monitoring and evaluation data for ESCAP research and analysis work improved as a result of the institutional results

framework and from the increased number of strategic and subprogramme evaluations.

26. The recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 3
Development and implementation of an outreach strategy

27. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

> ESCAP should develop and implement an ESCAP-wide outreach strategy for its research and analysis work that incorporates developing a database of all stakeholders, common branding elements for all publications and web pages, and dissemination for each type of work.

28. The recommendation was made on the basis of the evaluation result regarding the need for wider dissemination of ESCAP research and analysis work. ESCAP maintained some records on its audience but lacked consistent tracking of the dissemination of its research and analytical outputs.

29. In 2015, ESCAP started to produce communications plans for individual research and analysis outputs and intergovernmental events and, in 2016, it revamped its website to provide an up-to-date outreach platform and launched a corporate newsletter, which replaced individual subprogramme newsletters. ESCAP consciously shifted away from publishing hard copies of its publications to sharing publications and other communications using the Internet and social media platforms, although printed publications continued to be distributed to key stakeholders.

30. Work was also undertaken to establish common ESCAP branding elements. In 2017, the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section published communications guidelines for 2017. The guidelines, which included a publications style guide, were intended to keep ESCAP internal and external communications consistent and coherent across the Commission. An internal memo from the Executive Secretary, dated 16 October 2017, stressed the need to maintain a visual identity across ESCAP publications in order to raise the Commission's profile.

31. During the triennial review, the ESCAP secretariat updated the communications and advocacy strategy created for the 2011–2012 biennium. A draft ESCAP communications and outreach strategy was available, and was scheduled for discussion as part of an internal consultation process on how to strengthen ESCAP research work. At the time of writing, the release of the final version of the strategy was expected within three months.

32. At the time of the triennial review, a single database containing the names and addresses of all stakeholders for the dissemination of ESCAP publications had not been created. According to staff interviewed, ESCAP did not have sufficient resources to develop and maintain a single comprehensive database and so continued to maintain three different stakeholder lists that served different but related functions. The Office of the Executive Secretary maintained a common list of member States and associate members, international and United Nations organizations, non-governmental organizations and relevant non-ESCAP members; the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section maintained a media mailing list; and substantive divisions maintained a division-level list of research and academic institutions and subject-matter experts. Staff also indicated that the three stakeholder lists fulfilled the purpose of disseminating ESCAP research and analytical outputs.

33. As a result of the institutional results framework, ESCAP monitored access to its research and analysis work. Web analytics were used to track the number of page views of and downloads from the ESCAP website. Online access to ESCAP publications increased from 2016 to 2017 by 31 per cent in terms of downloads and by 1,214 per cent in terms of page views. During that period, the increase in percentage of downloads was greatest for the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2016: Year-end Update* (241 per cent), and that publication also experienced the most downloads in absolute terms (1,278). In 2017, ESCAP also tracked Twitter coverage of its publications. ESCAP is not yet able to track citations to ESCAP publications, and thus the extent to which research and analysis outputs are being used. ESCAP staff indicated that the development of a centralized digital depository for that purpose would be complicated and expensive.

34. The recommendation was partially implemented. In order to be fully implemented, ESCAP needs to finalize its communications and outreach strategy. That should include the consolidation of the current three mailing lists into a single stakeholder database.

Recommendation 4
Implementation of the framework on the working relations between ESCAP subregional offices and divisions

35. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

> The Executive Secretary should implement and enforce the November 2012 framework (after updating it, as applicable) on the working relations between subregional offices and divisions, which clarifies their respective roles, responsibilities and authority. As part of the framework's implementation, ESCAP should discuss the question of resource allocation as it relates to its expected accomplishments.

36. The recommendation was made on the basis of the evaluation result regarding the lack of implementation and enforcement of the ESCAP November 2012 framework on the roles and responsibilities of subregional offices and divisions. Divisions and subregional offices lacked a shared understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities and faced limited resources and structural questions related to the engagement of subregional offices in substantive work.

37. On 26 November 2014, the Executive Secretary issued an updated guidance note on relations between ESCAP substantive divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions. The guidance note was developed with inputs from senior management and superseded the November 2012 framework on the working relations between ESCAP subregional offices and divisions.

38. During interviews, staff from ESCAP noted that, over time, divisions and subregional offices had arrived at a common understanding of their respective roles, responsibilities and added value; they stated that information exchanges, mutual engagement and collaboration worked well. They also stated that the advantages of subregional offices were their proximity and accessibility to member States, their knowledge of local contexts and their integrative nature, bringing together vertical divisions and subprogrammes. At the same time, staff suggested that good collaboration could not be attributed solely to formal guidance, and that mindsets, structures and systems, such as iSeek, which is an internal communications and knowledge-sharing tool for Secretariat staff serving at all duty stations and field missions, and the holding of "weekly briefs", also influenced collaboration.

39. The Strategy and Programme Management Division was charged with facilitating and supporting regular joint planning and review processes in line with the provisions of the guidance note, including (a) annual joint planning and review meetings of all divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions; and (b) regular bilateral consultation meetings as required between divisions, subregional offices and/or regional institutions for joint planning, review and implementation purposes. Three platforms in particular served the purpose of ensuring adequate coordination as specified in the provisions of the guidance note: weekly meetings of the Senior Management Team, "weekly briefs" and semi-annual consultation meetings organized by the Strategy and Programme Management Division.

40. The guidance note required that implementation be reviewed periodically by the ESCAP Senior Management Team and that adherence to the provisions contained in the note were to be included in the performance goals, targets and appraisal of all members of the Senior Management Team. The Strategy and Programme Management Division was also delegated responsibility for monitoring compliance and bringing issues to the attention of the Executive Secretary. There was, however, no evidence that the provisions of the guidance note were included in the employee performance appraisal systems.

41. The ESCAP evaluation plan for 2017–2019 scheduled an evaluation of the subregional offices, including cooperation and coordination with ESCAP substantive divisions and regional institutions in 2019, budget allowing.

42. While the guidance note did not address resources or structural questions, staff interviewed did not suggest particular challenges related to funding. Regular resource requirements for subprogramme 8, Subregional activities for development, ranged from $7.4 million for the biennium 2012–2013 to $8.1 million for 2014–2015, and from $7.9 million for 2016–2017 to $8.3 million (proposed) for 2018–2019. The number of budgeted posts (regular resources) for the subregions also ranged from 23 in 2012–2013 to 25 in 2014–2015, and from 24 posts in 2016–2017 to 25 (proposed) in 2018–2019. A P-5 professional post, based at ESCAP headquarters in Bangkok, was proposed for the South-East Asia region in 2018–2019. Three division-level professional posts were proposed for relocation to the North and Central Asia subregional office, but would continue working for their respective divisions.

43. A revised guidance note exists and working relations and resource allocations between substantive divisions and ESCAP subregional offices appear satisfactory. However, ESCAP can continue to strengthen the working relations between its subregional offices and divisions by implementing its review mechanisms for the guidance note.

44. The recommendation has been implemented.

III. Conclusion

45. ESCAP took important steps to implement the four recommendations contained in the OIOS evaluation relevant to its research and analysis work on the one hand and its subregional work on the other. Some positive changes were seen as a result. The ESCAP research and publications agenda was strengthened, befitting the Commission's role as a regional think tank within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Opportunities for promoting publications with national policymakers were sought and publications reached more potential users. In addition, ESCAP enhanced its monitoring and reporting efforts to capture the extent to which

research and analysis outputs were produced and contributed to overarching institutional goals. Furthermore, collaboration between ESCAP substantive divisions and its subregional offices appeared to have improved owing to the use of the guidance note on relations between ESCAP substantive divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions. The planned self-evaluation of the subregional offices should provide important further insights.

46. Not all recommendations by the Research and Publications Committee were addressed by the Editorial Board, however, possibly resulting in some missed opportunities, such as strengthening human resources capacities to administer and manage the ESCAP publications programme or building ESCAP research capacities. In addition, ESCAP should finalize the communications and outreach strategy, and establish a single stakeholder database.

(*Signed*) Heidi **Mendoza**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
March 2018

Annex*

Comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

The management of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) expresses its appreciation to the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for undertaking a comprehensive, consultative and evidenced-based process in reviewing the implementation of recommendations emanating from the OIOS programme evaluation of ESCAP. Since 2014, ESCAP has introduced new guidelines and measures to strengthen the prioritization and effectiveness of all aspects of its programme of work. Its key strategy focused on serving the Commission's core role as a regional think tank; providing the pre-eminent regional intergovernmental platform for building policy consensus and regional cooperation on inclusive and sustainable development; and serving as a regional development knowledge hub. The findings of the present OIOS triennial review contain valuable evidence of the considerable progress made by ESCAP towards its goal.

It was gratifying to note that the OIOS review confirmed positive changes in ESCAP research and analysis work, including improved quality and timeliness of ESCAP publications; better linkages between ESCAP research and analysis and its normative and technical cooperation work; improved credibility of ESCAP as a research organization; wider dissemination of ESCAP publications through the Internet and social media; and increased availability of monitoring and evaluation data on ESCAP research and analysis work.

With respect to the implementation of the recommendations, it was noted that of the four recommendations, three were implemented and one recommendation (recommendation 3) was partially implemented. In order to be fully implemented, OIOS advised that ESCAP needs to finalize its communications and outreach strategy and consolidate its current three mailing lists into a single stakeholder database. ESCAP management is committed to implementing the remaining actions and fully addressing the OIOS recommendation in line with its efforts to further strengthen the dissemination and impact of its research, analytical and publications work.

In that context, ESCAP management has initiated a process of significant deliberation and reflection on the current United Nations development system reform proposals initiated by the Secretary-General, suggesting, among other things, the strengthening of the role of the regional commissions as think tanks. As part of that process, a senior management workshop was held in January 2018 to discuss the various elements of the United Nations development system reform proposals and agree on how to further strengthen ESCAP. Regardless of the final decision on the reform of the United Nations development system, it was decided that ESCAP would further improve the quality and impact of its research and analysis in conjunction with its intergovernmental and technical cooperation work and introduce initiatives and changes that could strengthen the formulation and dissemination of its analytical work. Those changes will be reflected in an update of the ESCAP communications and outreach strategy that will address the recommendation of OIOS.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services presents the full text of comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. This practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

With respect to the development of the single stakeholder database, ESCAP currently maintains three different stakeholder lists that serve different but related functions. The Office of the Executive Secretary maintains a common list of member States and associate members, international and United Nations organizations, non-governmental organizations and relevant non-ESCAP members; the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section maintains a media mailing list; and substantive divisions maintain a division-level list of research and academic institutions and subject-matter experts. Those lists of stakeholders have fulfilled the purpose of disseminating ESCAP research and analytical outputs. ESCAP will further explore the possibility of consolidating those stakeholder lists into a single database as part of the implementation of Umoja Extension 2 at ESCAP.